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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

Topaz, Utah

DEDICATION OF TOPAZ CHURCHES

by

RUSSELL A. BANKSON

PROJECT REPORTS DIVISION

HISTORICAL SECTION

R. A. Bankson

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## DEDICATION OF TOPAZ CHURCHES

There have recently been three events of considerable significance in the religious field in Topaz. The first of these covered the Easter week-end services and program and has been documented and indexed as Topaz H451. This present document will cover the dedication of the Buddhist and Protestant churches, which have recently been constructed in the center by the labor of the parishoners. The third will be the documentation on the Buddhist Churches of America conference, which was held during the week-end of April 28-30.

The two new churches stand on the plaza in the center of Topaz. One faces the east and houses the Protestant denominations. The other faces the west and is occupied by the Buddhists. These buildings were formerly used by the CCC and the sections were hauled into the center last fall.

The churches have previously occupied recreation halls but when it was decided that these should be returned to Community Activities to provide recreation space, the church groups were informed that they might have the CCC buildings, providing that they were erected free of cost to the WRA.

The history of the Buddhist building shows that 101 men, at different times, were engaged in its construction, consuming a total of 436 man days. The construction of the building was begun on January 13, 1944 and was brought to a temporary halt on February 7 pending a construction permit from the Washington

offices. This came through on March 3 and construction was resumed and the structure was completed on April 17.

The Protestant church building was constructed with 96 individual workers participating. The actual construction started on January 25 and, like the Buddhist church, was brought to a halt on February 7. And like the Buddhist church construction was resumed on March 3 with the building being completed on April 8.

The program for construction of these buildings was developed by the Inter-Faith Ministerial Association. Working closely together, the members, representing all denominations and faiths in Topaz, developed their plans in a harmonious manner that brought a close understanding among the representatives of the different faiths. It is significant that at no time has there ever been any lack of harmony among the leaders of the respective religious groups in Topaz.

The church buildings were used, to some extent, before actual completion, for phases of the Easter celebration, but the formal dedication of the two buildings was set for a simultaneous service, to be conducted in the new civic auditorium, which stands in the middle of the plaza between the two buildings. The date chosen was the evening of Tuesday, April 18, 1944. There was an attendance of nearly 400 persons at the dedicatory service, which concluded with members of the Protestant faith being guests at the Buddhist church for a reception, while members of the Buddhist faith were guests at a

reception at the Protestant church.

The formal program included the following numbers:

Violin Selection.....Mr. Tokijiro Seki  
Introductory Talk.....Chairman  
Rev. J. K. Tsukamoto  
History of the Buildings.....Buddhist  
Mr. Seichi Wakayama  
Protestant  
Mr. K. Tanaka  
Dedicatory Remarks.....Rev. E. Kawamorita  
Introduction of Guests.....Chairman  
Remarks from Honored Guests.....Mr. Charles F.  
Ernst  
Mr. George Shimamoto  
Word of Thanks.....Rev. Zenkai Okayama

The introductory remarks were especially significant and set a theme for the service, as the Reverend J. K. Tsukamoto, who served as chairman, stressed the fact that while the world was engaging in a struggle of destruction on a vast scale, we here in Topaz have been engaged in acts of construction.

"We have just finished two buildings, which, in our minds, are the most important in Topaz, the Buddhist and Protestant church building," he said. "Significant is the fact that they were built in the center of Topaz, indicative of the central role of religion in the hearts of men and of community life."

In his dedicatory remarks, Reverend E. Kawamorita dwelt

one the same theme, stressing the significance of the central location of the churches.

A brief summary of his remarks follow:

"Religion has demonstrated its supreme worth as the seat of authority in life. In the history of the religions of the world, two stand out in prominence and importance, Buddhism and Christianity. The Government of the United States has wisely recognized the bodies of these two religions as being desirable in our relocation centers and have granted them freedom to carry on their services without restrictions and have encouraged their activities. In order to make the influence of these religious bodies more effective, the Administration has fostered the formation of the Inter-Faith Ministerial Association which as a unit has given stability to the community of Topaz as a united voice counseling and encouraging right dealings in all matters.

"Recently two new buildings have been completed on the high school plaza, the Buddhist and the Protestant buildings. These buildings, to be used exclusively by and designated exclusively for these churches are located in the center of this community. This is appropriate and significant because religion should be located centrally in the souls of the people and in the heart of the community life rendering service to humanity.

"It is a great pleasure and privilege to have all of you present here, member of the Administrative Staff and all who have contributed to the building of the two churches and to all

who have helped and otherwise taken interest in their construction, as we now announce the new buildings of the Topaz Buddhist Church and the Topaz Protestant Church to be officially dedicated.

"It is our sincere hope that with the added convenience and incentive, the Topaz Ministerial Association will continue to render its influence and help and provide a spiritual foundation to Topaz which will make it an ideal community."

Mr. Ernst, the first guest speaker, stressed the important role of religion in the affairs of the community, emphasizing the great need of dedicating ourselves to the things which these buildings represent.

Mr. George Shimamoto, the guest speaker representing the Community Council, declared that next to the necessities of life, such as food, clothing and abode, man has need of religion. In the history of man, religion has played an important part.

"While there are many religions and denominations, the fundamental basis of all religions are one....let the two buildings located in the center of Topaz be lights shining in the darkness to lead the people of this community," he said.

Reverend Zenkai Okayama of the Buddhist Church closed the exercise with his words of appreciation. He declared that it was the faith of the believers that completed the buildings.

"This same spirit must permeate the community life to build it up," he said. "If the people who will attend these meetings

give leadership in the upbuilding of the moral and spiritual life of the community, it will be a real act of thanksgiving for the buildings here dedicated."

In closing, the chairman thanked the guests and the audience for their participation and cooperation and extended to them cordial invitations to attend the Open House, which would immediately follow the conclusion of the program.